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P 171520Z AUG 07

FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8031

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000766

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EUR/SCE FOR HOH AND BALIAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2017

TAGS: [HR CROATIA](#) [PGOV PHUM PREL](#)

SUBJECT: US CARDINAL REACHES OUT TO CROATS

REF: ZAGREB 763

Classified By: Kirsten Selinger for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary and Comment. The August 12-14 visit of Theodore McCarrick, Emeritus Cardinal of Washington, to Croatia reassured Croatian leaders that the U.S. is engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina and interested in the situation of Croats there. McCarrick heard from Croatian leaders that Bosnia is a largely non-functional state still plagued by ethnic tensions, and that the fractious Croat contingent is preventing constructive dialogue on constitutional reforms. MFA State Secretary Hido Biscevic told McCarrick that Bosnian Croats feel abandoned, outnumbered, and marginalized in BiH, and that Zagreb will continue to send them the message that they need to be active participants in determining the country's future. The interethnic character of the country is an essential component to its stability, which is in turn critical for the entire region, he stated. One of the PM's closest advisors, Biscevic is likely Croatia's most knowledgeable expert on BiH, and his view was clear about the need to stabilize the three-pronged administration from both inside and outside the country and foster new leadership there. As Croats are well aware, instability next door would have a significant impact on the country, immigration, and its economy. McCarrick left Croatia determined to convey the message to Bosnian Croats that their concerns were being taken into account, particularly by the US, and of the need for them to further engage in BiH's future. End Summary and Comment.

Message of Concern and Confidence to Bosnian Croats

2. (SBU) As part of a regional trip, McCarrick visited Croatia and met with Biscevic, Deputy Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, Special Advisor to the President Budimir Loncar, and Cardinal Josip Bozanic. The meeting with Biscevic, who is one of the PM's closest advisors, went into the greatest detail. Biscevic discussed both problems within the Bosnian Croat community and Bosnia's future with McCarrick. His expertise on this issue, combined with his Bosniak background, gave a realistic if somewhat discouraging picture from Zagreb. (NOTE: Biscevic was recently elected as Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council of the

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SEECF and will be relocating to Sarajevo at the end of the year. END NOTE.) Biscevic explained the fractious nature of the Croat community in BiH, split between nine political parties. They have been dragged down by internal bickering, personality politics, and egos, he said, and as a result Croats feel marginalized and abandoned. The only leader who speaks for the Croat community as whole is Cardinal Puljic, Biscevic observed. Puljic's role is critical, according to Biscevic, and his thoughts on the future of BiH are important to regional stability.

3. (SBU) When the PM recently met with Bosnian Croat

political leaders in Mostar, Biscovic said that the PM told them to get involved, not to sit on the sidelines while their future was being determined, and to work together towards a future in BiH. They must be pragmatic and talk to Serbs and Bosniaks about a shared future, he said. Reiterating the PM's message (who called McCarrick by phone during lunch), Biscovic asked McCarrick to convey to Bosnian Croats a message of cooperation, concern, and self-confidence.

The Challenges of Leadership

14. (C) Referring to BiH Presidency Chairman Zeljko Komsic, Biscovic argued he didn't truly represent the Croats as he was elected by the entire populace, not only by Croats. Aligned neither with Dragan Covic (HDZ) or Bozo Ljubic (HDZ-1990), he has been less than effective in his position. President Mesic's Advisor Loncar told McCarrick he did believe Komsic was capable of being a voice for the Croats, but agreed that the other leaders were indeed mired in personality politics. Speaking of other BiH leaders, Biscovic commended Suljeman Tihic's dedication to keeping the state together. He recognizes the need to include Croats, Biscovic believes, and approaches obstacles realistically. For example, Tihic has focused on the substantive issue of police integration, rather than honing in on the inflammatory problem of their arm patches. Biscovic contrasted Tihic's approach to that of Haris Silajdic, calling the latter leader "the biggest danger for BiH". His quasi-nationalism and cheap populism may have resonated during the war, but serve to deepen the divisions and are only to the detriment of the country, he warned. In this vein, Biscovic continued, Silajdic has instigated troubles with Serbs and also Croats in order to exacerbate the rifts.

Bosnia: A "Three-Legged Stool"

15. (SBU) Keeping Bosnia's interethnic character is key, Biscovic stressed. He compared the country to a three-legged stool, which was finely balanced but which could not stand without the participation of all. Without such balance and assurances, he warned, ethnic Croats have the option of leaving for Croatia as they all are eligible for Croatian citizenship. Many parents will certainly choose to send their children across the border to a wealthier Croatia bound for NATO and the EU if BiH doesn't hold a future for them, he reasoned.

16. (C) "We need to have a frank discussion on the shape of BiH that includes Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks; we need new, young, non-wartime leaders for the country, and we need the international community to induce this new generation of leadership", Biscovic continued. The country needs to find a balance between national pluralism and democratic representation: the "second string" of leaders of all ethnicities are hard-liners in favor of splitting the country. For the first time in history, he explained, BiH is wrestling with the reality of statehood and independence, and international engagement and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures are all the more important to its success. Biscovic told McCarrick that he recently met with Bosniak leaders and conveyed the need to reach out to Croats, not just to Serbs. The leaders responded that they (Bosniaks) largely look to Zagreb, to the US, and to the Vatican for guidance.

17. (C) Biscovic reiterated Puljic's role in BiH's future. He relayed Puljic's ideas on a future BiH structure that unites the country by encompassing essential state functions, decentralizes government through five to seven component parts without regard to national majority divisions, and ends Republika Srpska's status. Biscovic agreed that without such changes, BiH will look like Syria's Lebanon: always hostage to Belgrade's wishes. Without more stability, BiH will be destined to be a "sunflower", turning either to Zagreb or Belgrade for guidance. Loncar told McCarrick that the best

structure for B-H would be a strengthening of the central government effectiveness and also local government authority.

Bosnian Croats need to look to Sarajevo, not Zagreb, he stated, and praised PM Sanader for endorsing this view. While Biscevic did not share his own view on the shape of a future BiH, he agreed that the current status of RS is untenable. The status of RS, he said, is putting the brakes on further integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and keeping the country closer to Serbia's integration timeline. In fact, he commented, the current RS-Belgrade relationship is a type of self-preservation for Belgrade within BiH.

Caution on the Kosovo Effect

18. (SBU) Despite the need for change, Biscevic remained cautious about the pace of constitutional reforms. The impact of Kosovo's future status on Belgrade will be a great shock, he warned, and needs to be considered when reviewing reforms in BiH. As a Kosovo resolution is fast approaching, we must remember that Belgrade is facing the loss of the province and will be unsteady. At the same time, we must reassure Belgrade of the integrity and stability of BiH and support BiH institutions. Loncar conveyed a similar message to McCarrick, warning about possible spillover effects of Kosovo independence in BiH and that reported comments about a partition of Kosovo by EU representative Ischinger would only raise more questions about redrawing other lines in the former Yugoslavia.

McCarrick: Ensure Bosnian Croats Voices Are Heard

19. (SBU) At all his meetings, Cardinal McCarrick offered a view of his upcoming trip to BiH. His visit, he hoped, would help give the Bosnian Croats assurances that their views were being heard in Sarajevo and taken into account by the US. They want to know there is a place for them in the country, McCarrick repeated, and suggested several confidence-building steps. Puljic, whom McCarrick knows well, has complained that the permitting process to build a new church has been stalled, and hopes to build a hospital and nursing facility too. Movement on these projects, McCarrick suggested, would be tangible evidence that there is a good faith effort in Sarajevo to reach out to Croats. McCarrick also confided that Puljic has felt sidelined by the US. Efforts to reach out to him even further would be greatly welcomed, McCarrick suggested.

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